



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

1400 S. 19th Avenue
Bozeman, Montana 59715

July 11, 2011

To: Governor's Office, Mike Volesky, State Capitol, Room 204, P.O. Box 200801, Helena, MT 59620-0801
Environmental Quality Council, State Capitol, Room 106, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704
Dept. of Environmental Quality, Metcalf Building, P.O. Box 200901, Helena, MT 59620-0901
Dept. of Natural Resources & Conservation, P.O. Box 201601, Helena, MT 59620-1601
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks:

Director's Office	Parks Division	Lands Section	FWP Commissioners
Fisheries Division	Legal Unit	Wildlife Division	Design & Construction

MT Historical Society, State Historic Preservation Office, P.O. Box 201202, Helena, MT 59620-1202

MT State Parks Association, P.O. Box 699, Billings, MT 59103

MT State Library, 1515 E. Sixth Ave., P.O. Box 201800, Helena, MT 59620

James Jensen, Montana Environmental Information Center, P.O. Box 1184, Helena, MT 59624

Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon Council, P.O. Box 595, Helena, MT 59624

George Ochenski, P.O. Box 689, Helena, MT 59624

Jerry DiMarco, P.O. Box 1571, Bozeman, MT 59771

Montana Wildlife Federation, P.O. Box 1175, Helena, MT 59624

Beaverhead Conservation District, 420 Barrett Street, Dillon, MT 59725

John Gibson, PLWA, 3028 Avenue E, Billings MT 59102

John Gatchell, Montana Wilderness Association, 30 South Ewing, Helena MT 59601-5704

Wayne Hurst, P.O. Box 728, Libby, MT 59923

Jack Jones, 3014 Irene St., Butte, MT 59701

Todd Tash, 1532 Highway 278, Dillon, MT 59725

John Erb, 540 Skyline Drive, Dillon, MT 59725

Harris Wheat, P.O. Box 711, Dillon, MT 59725

Paul Godecke, 2312 MT Highway 91 South, Dillon, MT 59725

Roscoe Pilon, 1425 Carrigan Lane, Dillon, MT 59725

Tom & Becky Miller, 1250 Carrigan Lane, Dillon, MT 59725

Chris Brozell 479 ½ Kentucky Ave., Dillon, MT 59725

Beaverhead County Commissioners, County Courthouse, 2 South Pacific St., Dillon, MT 59725

Beaverhead Outdoors Association, P.O. Box 1401, Dillon, MT 59725

Skyline Sportsmen Association, P.O. Box 173, Butte, MT 59701

Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, 42487 Complex Blvd., PO Box 278, Pablo, Montana 59855

Blackfeet Nation, 1 Agency Square, Browning, MT 59417

Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, P.O. Box 306, Fort Hall, ID 83203

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The enclosed supplemental Environmental Assessment (EA) has been prepared for the proposed Poindexter Slough Fishing Access Site Habitat Enhancement. This project would allow for controlled livestock grazing, haying and mowing as part of an ongoing effort to establish dense nesting cover, food plots and a shelterbelt for the benefit of upland birds, waterfowl and other wildlife. The project is a joint effort between Montana FWP and the Beaverhead Chapter of Pheasants Forever.

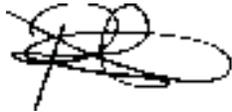
This Draft EA is available for review in Helena at FWP's Headquarters, the State Library, and the Environmental Quality Council. It also may be obtained from FWP at the address provided above, or viewed on FWP's Internet website: <http://www.fwp.mt.gov> .

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks invites you to comment on the attached proposal. The public comment period will be accepted until 5:00 PM August 11, 2011. Comments should be sent to the following:

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Poindexter Comments
730 North Montana St.
Dillon, MT 59725

Or e-mailed to: cfager@mt.gov

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Patrick J. Flowers', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick J. Flowers
Region Three Supervisor

Attachment



Poindexter Slough Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Project

MEPA/NEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST

PART I. PROPOSED ACTION DESCRIPTION

1. Type of Proposed State Action: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP), in cooperation with the Beaverhead Chapter of Pheasants Forever (BCPF), is systematically modifying upland habitat on a portion of Poindexter Slough Fishing Access Site (FAS) for the benefit of upland birds and other wildlife. This environmental assessment (EA) provides supplemental analysis to the original project EA completed in August 2010 (<http://fwpiis.mt.gov/content/getItem.aspx?id=44578>). The original EA included five project elements that are currently being implemented. The specific projects include: 1) the construction of approximately 0.8 miles of boundary fence, 2) the replacement of a small bridge to a tributary of the main slough, 3) the conversion of approximately 150 acres of old, unproductive hayfields to dense nesting cover, 4) the interspersing of food plots throughout the project, and 5) the planting of a shelterbelt complex to enhance winter cover and food for upland game birds. This EA proposes and analyzes the use of controlled livestock grazing and haying as a means to implement nesting cover and food plots. The original EA did not contemplate and precluded the use of livestock or haying as project tools. Subsequently both the FWP Wildlife Bureau and BCPF were challenged to implement the project in the most economical fashion possible. BCPF received an offer from a local agricultural producer to do the farming as a charitable donation. A need to manage the existing plant material in the acreage to be converted to dense nesting cover and food plots further was identified. The existing plant biomass must be reduced to allow for effective removal of existing undesirable grasses, allow for effective seedbed preparation and the establishment of the dense nesting cover and food plots. The project would employ nursery crops of corn or barley for one to two years to allow for the effective removal of existing undesirable grasses and their root systems. Controlled livestock grazing is the preferred option for practical and cost effective implementation of the project. Harvesting a hay crop on a cost share basis or for the purposes of biomass or weed management is an option that the partners desire to retain. Haying is constrained by limited access and a private bridge that cannot sustain heavy loads. Mowing on a fee basis does not meet the objective of cost effective project implementation but may be employed in small areas where other tools cannot be applied.

2. Agency Authority for the Proposed Action: Montana FWP has the authority to protect, enhance and regulate wildlife use and habitat for public benefit (MCA 87-1-201). The Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (UGBHEP) has provisions for entering into agreements with individuals or organizations desiring to enhance habitat (ARM 12.9.701). Specific UGBHEP applications and project requirements are contained in ARM 12.9.701 & 12.9.702. The Parks Division has specific rules contained in MCA 23-1-110 that apply to development or improvement of fishing access sites. FAS development rules

- * Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
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are further described in ARM 12.8.709. Constraint of animals, including pets and livestock, is described in ARM 12.8.203.

3. Name of Project: Poindexter Slough FAS Habitat Enhancement Supplemental Environmental Assessment

4. Name, Address and Phone Number of Project Sponsor (if other than the agency):

Beaverhead Chapter of Pheasants Forever
 P.O. Box 1383
 Dillon, MT 59725
 406-683-8257

5. If Applicable:
 Estimated Construction/Commencement Date: August 2011

Estimated Completion Date: April 2012

Current Status of Project Design (% complete): 75%

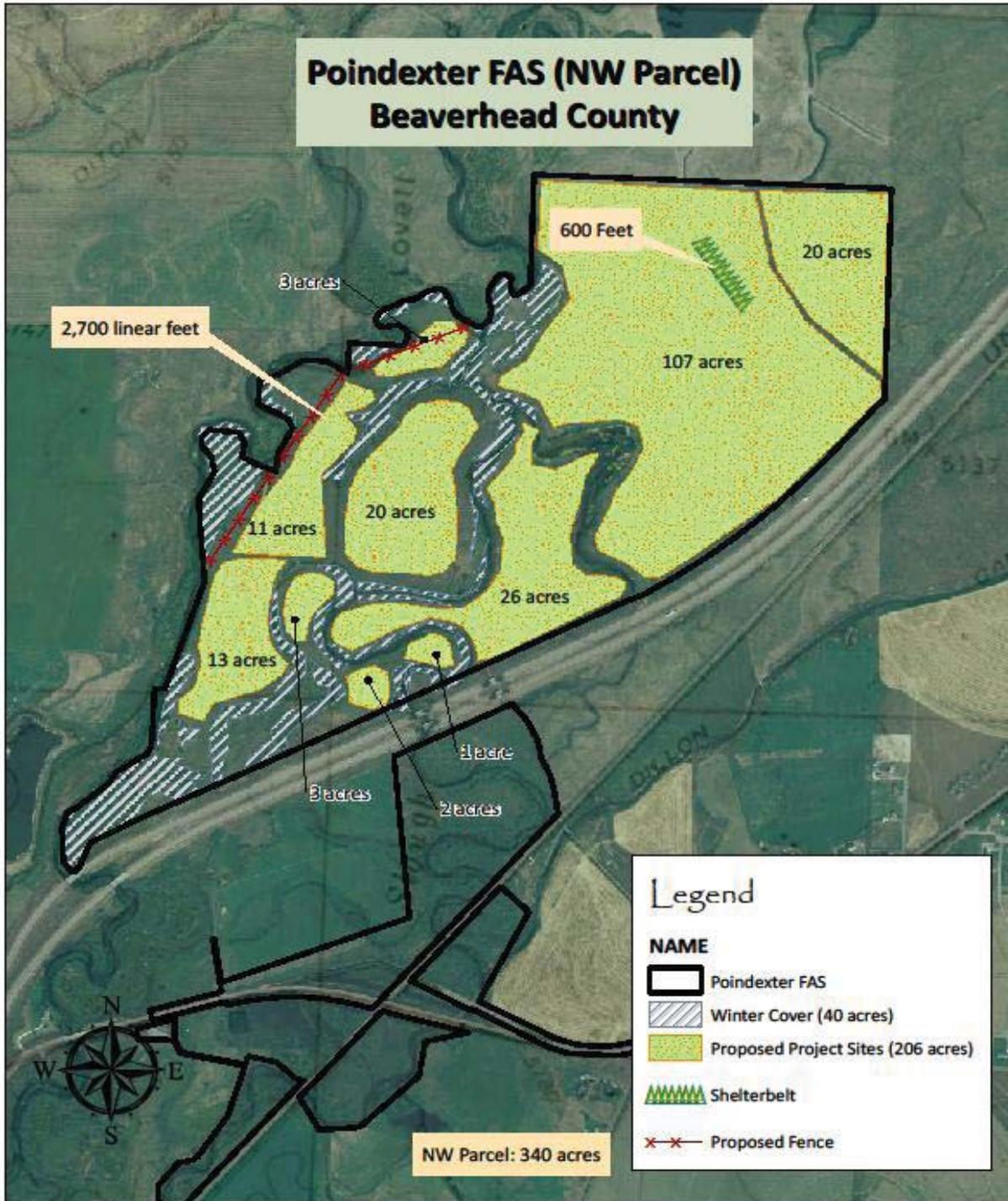
6. Location Affected by Proposed Action (county, range and township): Two miles southwest of Dillon, Beaverhead County, Township 7 South, Range 9 West

7. Project Size: Estimate the number of acres that would be directly affected that are currently:

Acres	Acres
(a) Developed:	(d) Floodplain..... _____
residential..... _____	
industrial..... _____	(e) Productive:
	irrigated cropland..... _____
(b) Open Space/Woodlands/Recreation..... _____	dry cropland..... <u>200</u>
	forestry..... _____
(c) Wetlands/Riparian Areas..... _____	rangeland..... _____
	other..... _____

8. Map/site plan: attach an original 8 1/2" x 11" or larger section of the most recent USGS 7.5' series topographic map showing the location and boundaries of the area that would be affected by the proposed action. A different map scale may be substituted if more appropriate or if required by agency rule. If available, a site plan should also be attached.

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Sec(s). 26, 27, 34, 35, T7S R9W



9. Listing of any other Local, State or Federal agency that has overlapping or additional jurisdiction.

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(a) Permits:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Permit</u>	<u>Date Filed/#</u>
Montana FWP	124	03/07/2011
Montana DOT	Controlled Access	02/2011

(b) Funding:

<u>Agency Name</u>	<u>Funding Amount</u>
Montana FWP	\$1000.00
Pheasants Forever	\$500.00

(c) Other Overlapping or Additional Jurisdictional Responsibilities:

10. Narrative summary of the proposed action or project including the benefits and purpose of the proposed action: FWP proposes to use controlled livestock grazing and/or haying as a means to manage the standing crop of existing grasslands and nursery crops that will be used as an intermediate planting on the acreage proposed for dense nesting cover or food plots.

Domestic cattle would be utilized in the late winter or early spring to remove the standing crop. Livestock would be fenced off from Poindexter Slough by a one-wire electric fence. The fence wire would be laid down on the ground or removed when not in use. The fence would be entirely removed once dense nesting cover or food plots are established. Controlled livestock grazing would be the most environmentally sound and economical tool to manage crop biomass and allow for effective seedbed preparation. In May 2011, FWP, BCPF and Montana DNRC used prescribed fire on approximately 40 acres in lieu of livestock grazing. Burning is an effective management tool but is manpower intensive, cannot be employed near Interstate 15, has some liability risks and creates air pollution.

Harvesting a hay crop is another alternative to livestock grazing or burning acres proposed for treatment. Haying is constrained by the limited access to the site and a weak private bridge that cannot accommodate heavy loads. Further there is little crop value in the existing grasslands due to years of accumulation of dead plant matter. Nursery crops of barley may have limited commercial value as hay, but the crop would be low yielding because it would not be irrigated.

FWP, BCPF and the producer implementing the project recognize that controlled livestock grazing is the most practical and economical means of managing plant material. Haying or mowing may also be used to manage vegetation in smaller areas that are not converted in the first phases of dense nesting cover and food plot establishment. Livestock grazing, prescribed fire, haying or mowing could also have utility in restoring and regenerating dense nesting cover if it becomes stagnant over

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time or weeds become an issue. FWP has employed all of these practices on Poindexter FAS in the past.

11. List of agencies consulted during preparation of the EA:

USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service
 Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation

RT II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

1. Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

1. <u>LAND RESOURCES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Soil instability or changes in geologic substructure?			X		Yes	1a
b. Disruption, displacement, erosion, compaction, moisture loss, or over-covering of soil which would reduce productivity or fertility?			X		Yes	1a
c. **Destruction, covering or modification of any unique geologic or physical features?		X				
d. Changes in siltation, deposition or erosion patterns that may modify the channel of a river or stream or the bed or shore of a lake?			x		Yes	1a
e. Exposure of people or property to earthquakes, landslides, ground failure, or other natural hazard?		X				
f. Other:						

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Land Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

1a. Livestock grazing would create some minor level of soil instability, particularly in areas animals concentrate during inclement weather. Livestock would remove the existing grasses or nursery crop to allow farm equipment to prepare the seedbed for planting dense nesting cover or food plots. This process is expected to take 2 to 4 years with livestock present in any given pasture for 4 to 6 weeks annually. Livestock would be confined by a one-wire electric fence designed to protect the riparian vegetation along Poindexter Slough, the Beaverhead River and tributaries. The vegetative buffer and the flat upland topography should minimize any siltation or erosion, which is a major, ongoing management issue in Poindexter Slough. Maintaining the riparian vegetation community is a high priority for the FWP Fish and Wildlife Bureaus and BCPF because it provides important winter cover for upland birds, bank stability, fish habitat and minimizes siltation. Haying or mowing would not impact soil stability or contribute to siltation. These practices would diminish the standing crop of grasses or nursery crop for a longer period of time than livestock grazing because they would be done in the late summer or fall. These practices would accomplish the same goal as livestock grazing and may be appropriate in small areas where livestock are not the proper tool. Haying is particularly constrained because of a load limits on a private bridge.

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2. <u>AIR</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. **Emission of air pollutants or deterioration of ambient air quality? (also see 13 (c))		X				
b. Creation of objectionable odors?			X		Yes	2b
c. Alteration of air movement, moisture, or temperature patterns or any change in climate, either locally or regionally?		X				
d. Adverse effects on vegetation, including crops, due to increased emissions of pollutants?		X				
e. ***For P-R/D-J projects, will the project result in any discharge, which will conflict with federal or state air quality regs? (Also see 2a)		N/A				
f. Other:						

2b. Livestock may create odors through gas emissions or manure that are objectionable to some people. Haying or mowing may create local areas where diesel emissions are noticeable. These impacts would be localized, short lived and easily avoidable by the recreating public. Dense nesting cover, food plots, shelter belts, boundary fence and bridge work will occur on less than 10% of the FAS acreage in 2011 and about 40% of the overall acreage over the course of the project, a very minimal portion of the total acreage.

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3. <u>WATER</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated*	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. *Discharge into surface water or any alteration of surface water quality including but not limited to temperature, dissolved oxygen or turbidity?		X				3a
b. Changes in drainage patterns or the rate and amount of surface runoff?		X				
c. Alteration of the course or magnitude of floodwater or other flows?		X				
d. Changes in the amount of surface water in any water body or creation of a new water body?		X				
e. Exposure of people or property to water related hazards such as flooding?		X				
f. Changes in the quality of groundwater?		X				
g. Changes in the quantity of groundwater?		X				
h. Increase in risk of contamination of surface or groundwater?		X				
i. Effects on any existing water right or reservation?		X				
j. Effects on other water users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quality?		X				
k. Effects on other users as a result of any alteration in surface or groundwater quantity?		X				
l. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect a designated floodplain? (Also see 3c)		N/A				
m. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project result in any discharge that will affect federal or state water quality regulations? (Also see 3a)		N/A				
n. Other:						

3a. Livestock would require water within each pasture. Stock water would come from drain ditches, tributaries to Poindexter Slough or ponds within each pasture. Access to water would be controlled by the use of electric fence and wire panels as necessary. Livestock would not have access to Poindexter Slough or any tributary where sedimentation is likely to occur.

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4. <u>VEGETATION</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Changes in the diversity, productivity or abundance of plant species (including trees, shrubs, grass, crops, and aquatic plants)?			X		Yes	4a
b. Alteration of a plant community?			X		Yes	4a
c. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
d. Reduction in acreage or productivity of any agricultural land?		X				
e. Establishment or spread of noxious weeds?			X		Yes	4e
f. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect wetlands, or prime and unique farmland?		N/A				
g. Other:						

4a. There would be a short-term decrease in the amount of grass cover due to the proposed grazing, haying or mowing. The original EA analyzed the removal of the smooth brome dominated community in the drier uplands of Poindexter FAS. The original EA did not address the existing grass crop or nursery crops and specifically precluded grazing or share cropping as tools. Smooth brome is an introduced grass that provides poor cover for uplands birds, particularly in winter. This project would replace the smooth brome community with species like slender, intermediate, tall wheatgrass or silver sage plus a forb component that provides lateral and overhead cover for upland birds plus insects that are critical for chick survival. Approximately 10 acres of the 150 total project acres would be reserved as food plots that would be planted in barley, corn or suitable grain on a biennial basis. Livestock grazing would be the most practical and economical tool to reduce the standing crop of smooth brome. The brome would be killed with a glyphosate treatment followed by treatment with a no till drill that would plant a nursery crop of barley or corn. The nursery crop is intended to give the soil time to break down the rootmass of the smooth brome and outcompete weeds. Nursery crops would be utilized for 1 to 2 years and the standing crop would be managed with controlled livestock grazing until the permanent dense nesting cover or food plots are established. Haying or mowing would be reserved as fallback measures where livestock grazing cannot be applied or for small projects after the majority of suitable acreage has been converted to either dense nesting cover or food plots.

4e. Poindexter FAS is infested with houndstongue and Canadian Thistle and has small patches of spotted knapweed. Cattle or other disturbances associated with the project may promote the spread of weeds. These weed species are addressed by FWP personnel, commercial applicators, Beaverhead County and a volunteer spray day. BCPF has dedicated funding to address weeds with a commercial applicator in the acres proposed for habitat conversion.

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** 5. FISH/WILDLIFE	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Will the proposed action result in:	Unknown *	None	Minor *		
a. Deterioration of critical fish or wildlife habitat?		X				
b. Changes in the diversity or abundance of game animals or bird species?			X		Yes	5b
c. Changes in the diversity or abundance of nongame species?		X				
d. Introduction of new species into an area?		X				
e. Creation of a barrier to the migration or movement of animals?			X		Yes	5e
f. Adverse effects on any unique, rare, threatened, or endangered species?		X				
g. Increase in conditions that stress wildlife populations or limit abundance (including harassment, legal or illegal harvest or other human activity)?			X		Yes	5g
h. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project be performed in any area in which T&E species are present, and will the project affect any T&E species or their habitat? (Also see 5f)			N/A			
i. ***For P-R/D-J, will the project introduce or export any species not presently or historically occurring in the receiving location? (Also see 5d)			N/A			
j. Other:						

5b. The overall project is projected to have a positive impact on upland bird, waterfowl and white-tailed deer populations. The proposed actions in this EA will have a short term impact on the amount of ground cover but are a necessary means to implement the desired dense nesting cover and food plots. Nursery crops will provide food and cover for a variety of game and native species.

5e. The one-wire electric fence will create a temporary barrier to the movement of white-tailed deer and a potential collision source for waterfowl and other birds. The one-wire fence will be easy to negotiate but may be a surprise to some wildlife when it is first installed. If wildlife collisions become a problem the fence could be marked with ribbon in high traffic areas to make it more visible. The fence wire will be removed or laid flat on the ground when it is not in use. All wire and posts will be removed at the conclusion of the project.

5g. The project will result in increased harvest opportunity for pheasants, waterfowl and white-tailed deer. Nursery crops will be particularly attractive for waterfowl and white-tailed deer and will increase harvest opportunity in the short term. The project will create long-term habitat that will increase pheasant, waterfowl and white-tailed deer populations and harvest opportunity. Wildlife harvest is controlled through the upland game bird, migratory bird and big game regulations. Any adjustments to the regulations would be undertaken through the season setting process established by the FWP Commission. Poindexter FAS is a weapons restricted area and harvest is limited to shotgun, muzzle loader, archery or traditional handgun.

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B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

6. <u>NOISE/ELECTRICAL EFFECTS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Increases in existing noise levels?			X		Yes	6a
b. Exposure of people to serve or nuisance noise levels?		X				
c. Creation of electrostatic or electromagnetic effects that could be detrimental to human health or property?		X				
d. Interference with radio or television reception and operation?		X				
e. Other:						

6a. There would be short term increase in noise levels associated with one-wire fence construction, maintenance, livestock movement and haying. These impacts would be short lived and are not expected to reach nuisance levels. At least 50% of Poindexter FAS west of Interstate 15, including all of the slough, is wetland habitat and would not be impacted by the proposed action. Most of the recreation is concentrated fishing activity on the slough and Beaverhead River. Work crews could easily avoid concentrations of recreationists if any are present during project implementation.

7. <u>LAND USE</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of or interference with the productivity or profitability of the existing land use of an area?		X				
b. Conflicted with a designated natural area or area of unusual scientific or educational importance?		X				
c. Conflict with any existing land use whose presence would constrain or potentially prohibit the proposed action?			X		Yes	7c
d. Adverse effects on or relocation of residences?		X				
e. Other:						

7c. Poindexter FAS is a popular recreation destination for fishing, hunting and hiking. The proposed action would create a minor physical barrier through the presence of a one-wire electric fence. FWP and BCPF are proposing to remove the wire in high traffic areas when it is not in use and lay other sections on the ground to allow for the free movement of people, dogs and wildlife. All one-wire fence would be removed when dense nesting cover is established. This process is contemplated to take 2 to 4 years. FWP and BCPF are contemplating working on smaller areas of Poindexter FAS in the future. Livestock grazing and prescribed burning would probably not be the appropriate tools to manage the standing biomass in all of these areas. Haying or mowing on a share crop or fee basis are fallback tools that could be employed on areas where livestock grazing may not be an appropriate tool.

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8. <u>RISK/HEALTH HAZARDS</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Risk of an explosion or release of hazardous substances (including, but not limited to oil, pesticides, chemicals, or radiation) in the event of an accident or other forms of disruption?			X		Yes	8a
b. Affect an existing emergency response or emergency evacuation plan or create a need for a new plan?		X				
c. Creation of any human health hazard or potential hazard?			X		Yes	8c
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any chemical toxicants be used? (Also see 8a)		N/A				
e. Other:						

8a. Haying or mowing require equipment that can periodically fail; spills of fuel and/or oil can sometimes occur. FWP and BCPF are relying on the services of a professional contractor who is donating his expertise and modern equipment to the project. The risks associated with a spill are generally low and the volume of fuel or oil would generally be small. FWP and BCPF have the financial resources to remediate a spill if it were to occur.

8c. The fence required to control livestock will pose some hazard to the recreating public, pets and wildlife. The fence would allow for easy passage underneath as the wire height would be 30-36 inches. Gates would be installed and marked at customary access points. The fence wire would be removed in high traffic areas on an annual basis and laid flat on the ground in other areas. Post spacing would be approximately 45 feet. All of the fence would be removed at the conclusion of the project.

9. <u>COMMUNITY IMPACT</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Alteration of the location, distribution, density, or growth rate of the human population of an area?		X				
b. Alteration of the social structure of a community?		X				
c. Alteration of the level or distribution of employment or community or personal income?		X				
d. Changes in industrial or commercial activity?		X				
e. Increased traffic hazards or effects on existing transportation facilities or patterns of movement of people and goods?		X				
f. Other:						

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10. <u>PUBLIC SERVICES/TAXES/UTILITIES</u> Will the proposed action result in:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Will the proposed action have an effect upon or result in a need for new or altered governmental services in any of the following areas: fire or police protection, schools, parks/recreational facilities, roads or other public maintenance, water supply, sewer or septic systems, solid waste disposal, health, or other governmental services? If any, specify:		X				
b. Will the proposed action have an effect upon the local or state tax base and revenues?			X			10b.
c. Will the proposed action result in a need for new facilities or substantial alterations of any of the following utilities: electric power, natural gas, other fuel supply or distribution systems, or communications?		X				
d. Will the proposed action result in increased used of any energy source?			X		Yes	10d
e. **Define projected revenue sources						10e
f. **Define projected maintenance costs.						10f
g. Other:						

10b. The proposed action and the ongoing management activity will have a positive impact on the local tax base. The project will result in local sales of seed, fuel and fencing material that will support the local economy. The overall project will provide enhanced recreational opportunity that will support local businesses.

10d. The proposed action will require some energy input to construct the one-wire electric fence. The fence would be constructed using manual labor, a gas powered auger for periodic wood posts, a four wheeler for stringing wire and a pickup to haul material. Haying or mowing would require a swather and tractor powered by a diesel engine. Controlled livestock grazing is the preferred method of managing the standing biomass and would use the least of amount of energy to implement.

10e. The implementation of the one-wire electric fence is projected to cost \$1500. The costs would be split between the Upland Game Bird Habitat Enhancement Program (\$1000) and BCPF (\$500). BCPF received a charitable donation from a local agricultural producer for the implementation of this project. The livestock grazing or hay crop would be used as a tool to offset the producer costs under the charitable donation. If this arrangement fails, FWP and BCPF would seek to hire an agriculture producer to implement the project using the current NRCS cost schedule. Livestock grazing would remain the preferred method to economically manage any standing crop of grass or nursery crop. Any haying would be considered on a cost share basis that would take into account the costs and compensation for seed and ground preparation, the value of the crop, the cost of harvesting and the context of the management objective. Mowing would occur on a fee basis that is estimated to be worth about \$25.00 per acre but is not specifically captured in the current USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service cost schedule.

10f. The one-wire electric fence would take an estimated 20 man hours to construct, 8 hours annually to maintain and 16 man hours to remove at the conclusion of the project. This work would be accomplished by FWP and BCPF volunteers.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

** 11. AESTHETICS/RECREATION	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. Alteration of any scenic vista or creation of an aesthetically offensive site or effect that is open to public view?		X				
b. Alteration of the aesthetic character of a community or neighborhood?			X		Yes	11b
c. **Alteration of the quality or quantity of recreational/tourism opportunities and settings? (Attach Tourism Report)			X		Yes	11c
d. ***For P-R/D-J, will any designated or proposed wild or scenic rivers, trails or wilderness areas be impacted? (Also see 11a, 11c)		N/A				
e. Other:						

11b & c.. The proposed action would modify the existing upland habitat characteristics of Poindexter FAS. The proposed actions would remove a standing crop of grass or nursery crop as an intermediate step to ultimately establishing dense nesting cover on about 150 acres and food plots on approximately 10 acres. The project is anticipated to provide a public area that supports pheasants as well as more abundant waterfowl and white-tailed deer populations. The amount and impact of additional hunting based tourism to the area will depend on how successful the project is at establishing desirable habitat. The public demand for quality pheasant, waterfowl and white-tailed deer opportunity is extremely high.

12. CULTURAL/HISTORICAL RESOURCES	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
Will the proposed action result in:						
a. **Destruction or alteration of any site, structure or object of prehistoric historic, or paleontological importance?		X				
b. Physical change that would affect unique cultural values?		X				
c. Effects on existing religious or sacred uses of a site or area?		X				
d. ****For P-R/D-J, will the project affect historic or cultural resources? Attach SHPO letter of clearance. (Also see 12.a)		X				12d
e. Other:						

12d. A Class III Cultural Resource Inventory of the project area was completed on December 8, 2010. The inventory identified the beaver slide as the sole isolated cultural resource. The Montana State Historical Preservation Office concurred in this finding on January 7, 2011. No impacts to the beaver slide are anticipated as a result of the proposed action. The beaver slide is a locally important symbol.

- * Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.
- ** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)
- *** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.
- **** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

SIGNIFICANCE CRITERIA

13. SUMMARY EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE Will the proposed action, considered as a whole:	IMPACT *				Can Impact Be Mitigated *	Comment Index
	Unknown *	None	Minor *	Potentially Significant		
a. Have impacts that are individually limited, but cumulatively considerable? (A project or program may result in impacts on two or more separate resources that create a significant effect when considered together or in total.)		X				
b. Involve potential risks or adverse effects which are uncertain but extremely hazardous if they were to occur?		X				
c. Potentially conflict with the substantive requirements of any local, state, or federal law, regulation, standard or formal plan?		X				
d. Establish a precedent or likelihood that future actions with significant environmental impacts will be proposed?		X				
e. Generate substantial debate or controversy about the nature of the impacts that would be created?			X		Yes	13d
f. ***For P-R/D-J, is the project expected to have organized opposition or generate substantial public controversy? (Also see 13e)		X				
g. ****For P-R/D-J, list any federal or state permits required.		X				

Narrative Description and Evaluation of the Cumulative and Secondary Effects on Water Resources (Attach additional pages of narrative if needed):

13e. The proposed action may generate some level of local controversy. The overall project is currently well received in the Dillon community. Only 4 individuals commented to the original EA. The presence of livestock, both authorized and trespass, has created some concern on the Poindexter FAS in the last several years. Livestock may interfere with hunting, fishing or general recreational opportunity and can impact riparian vegetation, as analyzed above. FWP created some level of controversy by authorizing controlled livestock grazing in the spring of 2011 in contravention to the original EA. This practice was immediately abandoned and prescribed fire was used to treat approximately 40 acres in lieu of grazing, haying or mowing. No public comments were received regarding the burning operation.

* Include a narrative explanation under Part III describing the scope and level of impact. If the impact is unknown, explain why the unknown impact has not or can not be evaluated.

** Include a narrative description addressing the items identified in 12.8.604-1a (ARM)

*** Determine whether the described impact may result and respond on the checklist. Describe any minor or potentially significant impacts.

**** Include a discussion about the issue in the EA narrative and include documentation if it will be useful.

PART II. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW, CONTINUED

2. Description and analysis of reasonable alternatives.

Alternative A: Prescribed burning. This alternative would use prescribed fire as the primary tool to manage the standing crop of grass or nursery crop. FWP and BCPF view fire as a valuable but somewhat limited management tool. Neither FWP nor BCPF has the expertise or equipment to conduct prescribed fire operations and would have to rely on Montana DNRC, the local fire department or private contractors. Prescribed burning is manpower intensive, has liability concerns associated with wildfire, could create a hazard on adjacent Interstate 15 and could cause local air pollution concerns in and around Dillon. Prescribed fire can remain an available tool but given the manpower costs, limitations on where it can be applied and the potential liabilities it is not the appropriate tool for all of the project acreage.

Alternative B: No Action: This alternative is the status quo. The projects contemplated in the original EA could be implemented using mowing on a fee for service basis as a means to manage biomass. This alternative is not cost effective on a large scale, which is a central requirement of the FWP Upland Game Bird Enhancement Program.

3. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency: The project would be completed through the joint efforts of FWP and Pheasants Forever. It is FWP's responsibility to ensure that all projects are done in accordance with the limitations, rules, and regulations set forth in this EA, State law and the MOU between the Beaverhead Chapter of Pheasants Forever and FWP.

PART III. NARRATIVE EVALUATION AND COMMENT

The proposed actions combined with the projects set forth in the original EA represent a substantial management change on Poindexter FAS. The FAS has been a department property for over 30 years. All of the management practices contemplated in this EA have been applied on the property, primarily to manage weeds. This proposal provides tools to FWP and Beaverhead Chapter of Pheasants Forever to practically, economically, and efficiently implement habitat improvement projects.

PART IV. EA CONCLUSION SECTION

1. Based on the significance criteria evaluated in this EA, is an EIS required (YES/**NO**)? If an EIS is not required, explain why the EA is the appropriate level of analysis for this proposed action.

The proposed actions set forth in the EA are common management practices that were not contemplated in the original project EA but are necessary tools to

implement the overall project in a cost efficient manner. None of the proposed actions have a significant impact to the physical or human environment. The practices are in line with the FWP mission to preserve, protect and enhance wildlife resources for present and future generations.

2. Public comment on the project will be accepted for 30 days. If there is sufficient interest, a public meeting or a tour of the site will be scheduled during the comment period, with notices in the *Dillon Tribune* and *Montana Standard*.
3. Duration of comment period. Public comment on this proposal will be accepted from July 8 to August 8, 2011. Comments can be submitted in person at the FWP Dillon Field Office, through the mail at the address listed below, or emailed to Craig Fager at cfager@mt.gov. Please indicate 'Poindexter Comments' in the subject or address line.
4. Name, title, address and phone number of the person(s) responsible for preparing the EA:

Craig Fager
Montana FWP Wildlife Biologist
730 North Montana Street
Dillon, MT 59725
406-683-9305

APPENDIX A

23-1-110 MCA PROJECT QUALIFICATION CHECKLIST

Date: May 20, 2011

Person Reviewing: Craig Fager

Project Location: **Poindexter Slough Fishing Access Site**

Description of Proposed Work: FWP proposed to modify the upland habitat at the FAS to enhance upland game bird nesting cover, winter cover, and forage.

The following checklist is intended to be a guide for determining whether a proposed development or improvement is of enough significance to fall under 23-1-110 rules. (Please check all that apply and comment as necessary.)

- A. New roadway or trail built over undisturbed land?
Comments: *None*
- B. New building construction (buildings <100 sf and vault latrines exempt)?
Comments: *None*
- C. Any excavation of 20 c.y. or greater?
Comments: *None*
- D. New parking lots built over undisturbed land or expansion of existing lot that increases parking capacity by 25% or more?
Comments: *None*
- E. Any new shoreline alteration that exceeds a double wide boat ramp or handicapped fishing station?
Comments: *None*
- F. Any new construction into lakes, reservoirs, or streams?
Comments: *None*
- G. Any new construction in an area with National Registry quality cultural artifacts (as determined by State Historical Preservation Office)?
Comments: *No*

- H. Any new above ground utility lines?
Comments: *No*

- I. Any increase or decrease in campsites of 25% or more of an existing number of campsites?
Comments: *No*

- J. Proposed project significantly changes the existing features or use pattern; including effects of a series of individual projects?
Comments: *No existing use patterns will be impacted.*

If any of the above are checked, 23-1-110 MCA rules apply to this proposed work and should be documented on the MEPA/HB495 CHECKLIST. Refer to MEPA/HB495 Cross Reference Summary for further assistance.